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Research Paper

Exploring emotional response to images used in agritourism destination marketing

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the role that photography can play in agritourism destination marketing (ADM). The study utilized photo-elicitation and included five focus groups: two farmer groups, two visitors groups, and one of Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) staff and community members from the Greenbrier Valley in West Virginia. Participants were shown farm images used for agritourism marketing, and their responses were teased into themes. Results indicated that subjects preferred photos portraying animals and farmers together as well as photographs of farmers interacting with tourists. Participants also preferred photographs including children. Related to nostalgia, historical structures and landscapes were favorites. Visitors preferred visually appealing animals while common farm practices (e.g. animal ear tags) were considered unpleasant. The presence of fences evoked negative emotions from tourists and color images were preferred for promotions by farmers and tourists. The results can aid destination marketers by providing insight into the reactions certain photographs elicit for various stakeholders.

1. Introduction

Agritourism offers a spectrum of benefits to host farms, visitors, and rural communities. As the industry continues to grow, so does the need for information to guide the selection of effective imagery for marketing agritourism destinations. Agritourism destinations attract diverse audiences, ranging from local residents, home cooks, academics, and farmers themselves. Farms who host visitors must identify their niche target audiences and, in doing so, are faced with the task of selecting appropriate imagery to appeal to each group. Through a case study involving imagery used to market agritourism destinations in West Virginia, this study discusses the complexities in selecting images that appeal to a broad range of visitors. Utilizing a collection of images used for marketing by a group of pasture based livestock farms in the Greenbrier Valley, the authors explored how visitors with varying ranges of experience with farming, community residents, and farmers responded differently to certain photographic elements.

Agritourism consists of 'farming-related activities carried out on a working farm or other agricultural settings for entertainment or education purposes' (Arroyo, Barbieri, & Rich, 2013, p. 39), and provides an opportunity for direct farmer-to-consumer marketing. Agritourism

activities that might occur on a farm include but are not limited to: pick your own systems, recreational activities, hosted events such as weddings or festivals, guided tours, and dining or accommodation opportunities on the farm (Barbieri & Mahoney, 2009). Weaver (2006) describes agritourism, as one of the oldest forms of sustainable tourism, and notes its high potential to contribute to rural economies. According to the US Census, 23,350 farms took advantage of agritourism's economic benefits in 2007, reporting \$566 million in agritourism income (Thessen, 2007). Drawing visitors from other areas to farm attractions can bring substantial income to other community members because it creates the opportunity for tourists to spend money at local attractions, stores, lodging, and restaurants. Agritourism may also act as a tool for preservation of rural heritage (LaPan & Barbieri, 2013), help protect rural landscapes and open spaces (Barbieri & Mahoney, 2009), and contribute to the cultural and social aspects of communities while encouraging entrepreneurship (Naidoo & Sharpley, 2016). Bringing tourists onto farms helps create a personal connection between producer and consumer, encourages brand loyalty, and ultimately yields higher profits to the farmer (Tew & Barbieri, 2012). Additionally, positive experiences contribute to consumer decisions to revisit the farm (Choo & Petrick, 2014). While agritourism has received more attention in the

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last decade, there is a gap in the literature concerning the design of marketing and promotional strategies (Colton & Bissix, 2005). Farms and communities can only enjoy benefits of agritourism if they successfully attract consumers. To address this, the paper investigated the use of visual imagery in agritourism promotions.

The first aim of this study was to determine which types of photographs are the most appealing to consumers. The second was to determine if there was a difference in the way various agritourism stakeholders reacted to the photographs taken on agritourism farms. The specific research questions follow.

1. Why are some photographs more successful than others in agritourism destination marketing (ADM)? Specifically, what are the elements within a photograph that elicit a strong response or connection between informants and the image?
2. Is there a difference between what farmers find visually appealing and what other stakeholders are drawn to? If so, what are these differences?
3. What emotions and/or associations do these images provoke for the various stakeholder audiences?
4. What are the implications of these results for the design of ADM campaigns?

2. Agritourism marketing

Effective promotional strategies are crucial to the continued growth of local food systems. Some farms successfully establish a web presence, which assists farmers in reaching nearby urban markets that often have demand for gourmet and specialty products (Bond, Enns, & Brockhouse, 2011). Social media also helps foster communication between producers and consumers, as farmers can post daily updates on what is happening at the farm and announce products that will be available in the immediate future (Barbieri, Gao, Valdivia, Corinne, 2016). A California study on agritourism found that word of mouth was the leading form of promotion, with 97% of participants in a survey based research project citing it as the most effective type of marketing material (Rilla, Hardesty, Getz, & George, 2011). Signs outside of businesses, business cards/brochures, and websites were listed as other effective modes of marketing. Other recommended types of promotional materials included advertisements in regional magazines, both paid and feature stories in newspapers, chamber of commerce ads, materials in visitor bureaus, direct mail, and business newsletters (Rilla et al., 2011).

Social media and other marketing efforts aimed at promoting local foods tended to be pursued by individual farms. As a result, they failed to create a collaborative 'place-based identity' with which tourists can easily identify (Che, Veeck, & Veeck, 2005). Frien (2010) found that local growers in the agricultural area northeast of Spokane, Washington supported the collective desire to become a destination for agritourism by investing in print and web advertising that showcased farms and orchards open to visitors, citing a cohesive marketing strategy as a great contributor to branding the destination as a thriving agritourism hotspot (Frien, 2010). The results suggested that, like other services that benefit from pooled primary demand and synergies gained from foot traffic, agritourism providers should collaborate to develop a place identity which positions the location as a desirable destination with multiple attractions.

A high degree of participation in such membership-based business organizations can influence overall gross income, further supporting the value of cooperative branding in agritourism (Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008). However, less is known about how cooperative growers should best communicate with prospective consumers. A shared understanding of the needs and motivations of agritourists can guide the development of effective promotional materials (Srikatanyoo & Campiranon, 2010).

2.1. Agritourist motivations

Draper, Shenoy, and Norman (2006) suggested that agritourists are interested in activities that are unique to the destination, such as visiting local sites of historic significance or purchasing local food. Brown and Reeder (2007) found that farms located within close proximity to cities do well to offer recreational activities while those farther from heavily populated areas may want to offer habitat based attractions geared towards hunters, anglers, and trail riders. In Michigan, a survey revealed that the top reason cited for visiting agritourism operations was to buy or pick fresh produce (Che et al., 2005). Researchers have also noted differences between male and female agritourists, and Srikatanyoo and Campiranon (2010) found that female agritourists have the potential to be more demanding customers and will place a high value on safety while male customers, who still value safety, are more focused on scenery. The researchers also used a factor analysis to find three major groups of agritourist needs: 'activities and shopping; facilities, services, and location; and attractions and environment', as well as three types of agritourist motivations: 'agricultural experiences; quality of life, relationships, and adventure; and relaxation' (Srikatanyoo & Campiranon, 2010, p. 174).

In addition to understanding the motivations of agritourists, destination marketers may do well to appeal to culinary tourists. Culinary tourism intersects with the interests of agritourism stakeholders in that the marketing of food can reinforce the sustainability of a destination while also contributing to the regional branding of food products (Quan & Wang, 2003). One way to invoke a desire to visit farms among culinary tourists is to utilize photographs of farms as active landscapes in promotional materials that tell the story of a place (Schnell, 2011).

2.2. Photo-elicitation and destination marketing

Photography is inextricably linked with tourism, as images may inspire in viewers the desire to see for themselves the landscapes and cultural contents of a photograph (Neumann, 1992). In fact, the relationship between the images used to market tourist destinations and the resulting photographs that tourists take while visiting that destination can result in a mirroring effect whereby tourist snapshots attempt to recreate photographs in marketing materials (Garrod & Fyall, 2005). In a study of tour operators' websites, Björk (2010) explored how elements of the site could stimulate emotional responses, and found that photographs, along with information content and structure, were the most important elements for stimulating emotional responses influencing tourists' decision making process. Previous experiences, expectations, desires, and fantasies can shape the visitor's perception of an agritourism destination's idyll (Zhou, 2014). As such, it is important to not only understand which images are appealing, but also why. In the current photo-elicitation study, we have set out to explore just that, using a set of photographs used to market visitor experiences at West Virginia livestock farms.

As described by Collier (1967), photo-elicitation has been previously used as a development tool to generate conversation. In this process, photographs are taken of the subject or topic under study, and are used as a springboard for discussion (Purcell, 2009). Although the discussion might include the arrangement of the subject matter within the image, the medium used to capture the shot, and/or the style of the photograph, the subject matter featured in photographs is an essential topic for discussion when using the photograph to position a touristic offering.

Balomenou and Garrod (2014) denote two distinct methods of photo-elicitation including researcher-driven photo-elicitation and participant-generated image photo-elicitation, often referred to as volunteer employed photography (VEP). Researcher-driven photo-elicitation occurs when researchers produce their own visual data as a spring board for discussion based data collection (Collier, 1957; Matteucci, 2013). VEP methodology utilizes participatory photography

as participants themselves generate the images used for data collection (Balomenou & Garrod, 2014). Regardless of the strand employed, responding to an image allows the viewer to become an active spectator, recognizing how and why the image has an effect, rather than passively consuming the experience (Emerling, 2012).

Photo-elicitation has previously been applied to explore place attachment to rural areas. Ryan and Ogilvie (2011) utilized resident generated images order to understand consumers' motivations and provide recommendations to develop loyal purchase behavior. Researchers may also produce their own visual data in order to drive photo-elicitation-based data collection (Collier, 1957; Matteucci, 2013). Photographs of consumers have been used to explore their behavior and gain insights about ways to successfully market to those consumers (Purcell, 2009).

The use of photographs can greatly enhance the richness of the data accrued in participant based discussion (Ryan & Ogilvie, 2011), however there are limitations to both strands of photo-elicitation research. Within participant-driven photo-elicitation methodology, the time and effort of participants that take the photographs. One way to overcome the challenge and utilize photographs as a launching pad for discussion is to furnish the photographs for participants. As such, researcher-driven photo-elicitation is used in this study to identify the *most compelling subject matter* within the set of photographs intended to market agritourism to a variety of consumers.

3. Methods

The data for this study was collected in conjunction with an agritourism development pilot project with the Greenbrier Valley Pasture Network (GVPN), a collective of farmers practicing pasture-based livestock farming in West Virginia. The GVPN project was a funded, regional pilot program designed to create new alliances and strengthen existing linkages within the sustainable meat industry and the community of the Greenbrier Valley, West Virginia. West Virginia gained over 2000 farms between 2002 and 2007, and continues to lead the nation in the number of family owned farms (Bickers, 2009). The West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA, 2012) asserts that agritourism has increased the sales to WV agribusiness products to \$200 million, and exposed up to 300,000 out-of-state customers and companies to WV products.

The study aimed to identify the most compelling subject matter within a set of photographs intended to market agritourism to a variety of consumers. Given the significance of word-of-mouth in agritourism marketing, it was important to gain data that resulted from interaction of group members during a discussion that was actively facilitated by the researcher (Browell, 2000). Further, since the collection of consumer reactions to a product through focus groups are so clearly defined as a useful 'starting point' (Sorenson, 1988), it was an appropriate methodology for exploring the relatively new topic of how to use photographs in collaborative agritourism promotions.

A set of photographs, which were taken by a single photographer (the primary researcher) to establish a consistent photography style, was provided to participants. The photographs also provided an accurate representation of images used for agritourism destination marketing as they were used in an actual agritourism development pilot project by the farmers who participated in this study. This application of researcher-driver photo-elicitation allowed for the comparison of responses between farmers with a personal relationship to the farms depicted in the photographs against the responses of livestock farmers with no relationship to the photographs. Because the photographs were used to generate much of the direction of the discussion, the discussion questions were semi-structured in nature and the discussion was focused on the thoughts the images evoke (Sherren, Fischer, & Fazey, 2012). Focus groups have been utilized in photo-elicitation to generate interactive discussion among participants, leading to extended conversation, debate, and collaborative ideas (Andersson, Getz, Vujicic,

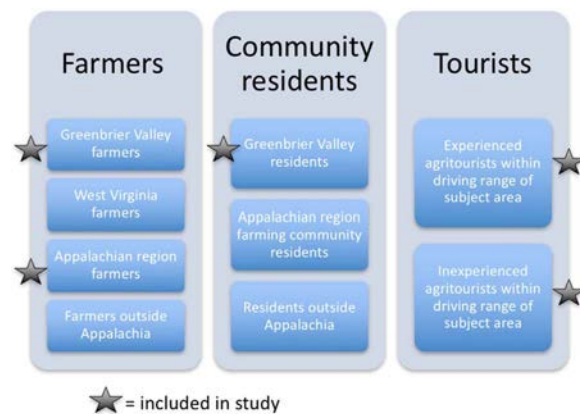


Fig. 1. Stakeholder list based on proximity to study area.

Robinson, & Cavicchi, 2016; Holgate, Keles, & Kumarappan, 2012). In this study, focus group participant dialogue provided the foundation for the comparison of various participant responses to the photographs using content analysis.

3.1. Sample

Focus group participants (FGPs) were stakeholders in tourism, including farmers who participate in agritourism, tourists with varying levels of participation in agritourism, and community members. Agritourism development concerns a broad group of stakeholders, presented in Fig. 1 based on proximity to the study area. Considering that the three primary stakeholders in agritourism are agritourism providers, Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), and agritourists (McGehee, 2007), it was deemed necessary to include input through focus groups from each sector. In total, five focus groups were held; each group contained 4–12 participants in order to maintain a small group size, except for the GVPN farmer group where all farmers who participated in the pilot project were included. The GVPN group was composed of farmers whose farms were depicted in the photographs. To gather the opinions of farmers without a personal tie to the photographs, a second livestock farmer group was solicited in Western North Carolina. Selecting farmers from this region ensured that the topography shown in the photographs was similar to the topography of the participant farms (the Appalachian Mountains). The community group participants were recruited through personal phone calls, and consisted of employees at the visitor's center who were involved in destination marketing, retail stakeholders, and individuals involved in community development. The tourists were accessed through a local food co-operative and were screened to ensure they either had high or low experience with agritourism. See Table 1 for a summary of participants by group.

3.2. Photo set

A wide range of images were selected including portraits of the GVPN farmers themselves, close-up shots of animals, expansive landscapes, brightly colored imagery, and black and white (B&W) shots. In selecting the photographs, the main categories for content included landscapes, animals, people, and farmhouse interiors or built environments. Additionally, images within these four broad categories also included key sub- criteria, i.e. each category contained a mixture of color vs. B&W, warm tones vs. cool tones, posed vs. candid moments, animals with and without fences, etc. This broad approach to categorization was necessary due to the risk that the content could become secondary to compositional elements (tonal range, colors, level of skill and technique). Including a wide range of photographs in the set helps to offset the inherent differences in composition in each category, and

Table 1
Summary of focus group participants.

	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Focus Group 4	Focus Group 5
Date held	11/22/14	11/22/14	2/22/14	2/29/14	2/29/14
Participant Description	Community members in Greenbrier Valley, WV	Greenbrier Valley farmers depicted in photographs	North Carolina farmers	Local food members (tourists) with low agritourism experience	Local food members (tourists) with high agritourism experience
Number of Participants	4	12	4	4	4
Gender Mix	4 Female	6 Female 6 Male	3 Female 1 Male	2 Female 2 Male	3 Female 1 Male
Ages	One 30's, One 40's, Two 50's	30's, Four 40's, Four 50's	One 30's, One 40's, Two 50's	Three 50's, One 20's	One 20's, One 30's, Two 50's
Relationship with Farms	Moderate exposure to farms	High knowledge of farming	High knowledge of farming	Low to moderate exposure to farms	High exposure to farms

Note: Ages are estimates, depicted by decade.

diminish any bias resulting from the primary researcher choosing each image (Beilin, 2005). The preliminary 'grouping' of image categories was not revealed to participants.

The primary researcher took all of the photographs used to springboard conversation during the focus groups over the course of the aforementioned agritourism pilot project from June through October of 2013. This was done for a number of reasons: (1) to limit bias that might result from various styles present in the work of different photographs, (2) to add an element of reality to the data set by using images that were actually used in a marketing campaign for agritourism, and (3) to allow for the comparison of responses between farmers with a personal relationship to the farms depicted in the photographs against the responses of livestock farmers with no relationship to the photographs.

3.3. Process

Each participant was provided with a set of 26 4x6 in. images, and was asked to look through the deck in order to familiarize themselves with the photographs. Next, participants were asked to complete a rating exercise, based on a rating system of 1 being equivalent to *No personal connection* and 4 denoting a *Strong personal connection* thereby determining the extent to which the photograph evoked an emotional connection to the content therein and allowing for exploration of implications for emotional marketing efforts.

In addition to selecting photographs with which they felt a connection, participants denoted their 'top five' favorite images, which were subsequently discussed with the group. During this time, the moderator used the set of predetermined questions to guide the dialogue.

To ensure that the conversation covered topics relevant to agritourism marketing in general, the moderator made a conscious effort to maintain focus on content rather than composition of the photographs. The general script of the questions follows, but may have been adjusted based on the direction of the discussion:

1. Now that you have had a chance to look through the images I would like for you to please choose the top five images that evoke a strong personal connection or emotional response for you.
2. Please tell me why you chose these five images. (Probe: What are some of the emotions that you felt when looking at specific pictures?)
3. Thinking about those same 5 photos, would you want to visit that farm? Why or why not?
4. How does your interest vary between photographs that contained people, and those that were focused on animals?
5. How does your interest vary between photographs that had no people and those that did?
6. How does what the people are doing in the images affect your response?

7. What are some other elements that have not been mentioned that affected your response?
8. What are some things that you did not find in this set of photographs that you think might appeal to you or other potential visitors to farms in a way that would encourage participation in agritourism?

3.4. Data coding and analysis

The conversation of each focus group was recorded and transcribed, scrutinized through content analysis, and subsequently coded according to the themes that emerged in responses. A case-by-case variable matrix from the texts and codes was formulated. This type of latent coding, recognized by Bernard and Ryan (2010), has become the norm in qualitative data analysis, creating a matrix that can be analyzed through a variety of methods. Applying this method of conventional content analysis is often deemed appropriate in situations where pre-existing theory on a topic is limited, and allows the researcher to formulate categories and variables as they flow from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

A team of three researchers worked separately to code the data, thereby using the strategy of triangulation, which increases credibility and accuracy in qualitative research (Pitney, 2004). The matrix was structured so that the researchers recorded the particular photograph's assigned number (e.g. #4, #19), what the participant said about the photo based on the prompts issued by the primary researcher, why the participants felt a particular way about a photo, any suggestions the participant had about improving the photograph, and which participant made the comments (so as to understand the context). A 'test set' of transcriptions was initially coded and the three researchers met to compare results and ensure a consistent approach. Discrepancies in coding were resolved and applied to the remaining transcripts.

To further ensure the trustworthiness of the coding process, the researchers followed the recommendations of Saldana (2012), to maintain a reflective journal on the research project containing notes on the coding process and the formulation of analytic memos. Trustworthiness was also established through the combination of various participant recruitment methods and consistent data collection (White, Oelke, & Friesen, 2012). Including thorough descriptions of the contextual factors related to data collection and focus group proceedings further established transparency and trustworthiness, making it apparent to investigators whether or not the research findings might be applicable in other scenarios (Orvik, Larun, Berland, & Ringsberg, 2013).

4. Findings

4.1. Focus group 1 – community group

This focus group consisted of community members in the host community where the photographs were taken and included DMO



Fig. 2. Photo 12 - Cow Behind Wooden Fence.

employees, local business owners, and an employee with a non-profit focused on community development. Three members of the group had extensive to moderate experience on and around farms (stemming from familial ties to farming) while the remaining person did not feel she was that familiar with farming life (having grown up in proximity to, but not on farms). The two participants in this group that were employed by the local DMO made frequent comments that related the photographs to marketing potential. Thus, marketing was a major theme in this group with participants focusing on images that they felt would entice visitors with the opportunity to have interactive and educational experiences. One of the FGP was specifically drawn to photographs that represented her own memory of growing up in proximity to a local farm, such as Photo 12 – cow behind wooden fence (Fig. 2), saying, ‘This is what I remember walking across the street, and looking eye-to-eye with a cow who is staring back at me. To me, a lot of this is part [of] having grown up in this valley, that I cherish. A lot of nostalgia.’ However, other participants in the group responded negatively to the same photograph (and other similar images that contained fences), noting that the cow seemed to have sad eyes. The disparate reactions indicate how an individual with less experience on a farm was drawn to this photograph while others who have more direct experience with agriculture and farm animals prefer the images of ‘free-ranging’ animals.

Other discussion by the FGPs covered the need to clearly indicate in each photograph which subjects were farmers or tourists. FGPs also described the photographs with words like ‘fulfilled’ and ‘passionate’ (referring to Photo 5 – female farmer bottle-feeding calves, Fig. 3), ‘pride’ and ‘joy’ (Photo 14 – farming couple in scenic landscape). There was a general preference for candid photographs that conveyed scenes of people interacting and having fun. Additionally, when asked what might be missing from the photos, FGPs discussed how the photographs used in marketing for agritourism should include children to accentuate the educational component of the experience (Table 2).



Fig. 3. Photo 5 - Female farmer bottle-feeding oxen.

Table 2
Photographs with strongest connection: Community group.

Photo #	Photo title	Average connection rating
13	Sunrise over landscape with silo	4.00
23	Fresh eggs in red basket	4.00
26	Brightly colored rooster	4.00
22	Portrait of a horse (B&W)	3.75
14	Farming couple in scenic landscape	3.50
18	Sheep with green grass and red ear tags	3.50
19	Farmhouse kitchen scene (B&W)	3.50
20	Farming couple posing with ram	3.50
24	Portrait of a cow (B&W)	3.50
12	Cow through wooden fence	3.25
3	Piglets feeding	3
5	Female farmer bottle-feeding oxen	3
8	Tourists in farmer's truck	3
9	Cows in open green field	3
10	Flowers in front of barn (B&W)	3
15	Red Devon cow through wire fence	3

Note: connection ratings were based on a Likert scale from 1 to 4, where 1 is no personal connection, 2 is somewhat of a connection, 3 is a personal connection, and 4 is a strong personal connection.

4.2. Focus group 2 – West Virginia livestock farmers

All of the farmers in this group were pasture-based livestock farmers in the Greenbrier Valley; their farms were depicted in the photographs. There were 12 participants with an even ratio between male and female. The conversation was hosted at a locally owned restaurant in the Greenbrier Valley. Ten of the farmers (representing five farms), primarily raised cattle, but also had small assortments of other animals on their farms such as pigs, horses, or chickens. Two of the farmers (one farm), specialized in mixed breeds, incorporating various animals such as pigs, rams, assorted poultry, and rabbits.

One of the most frequently mentioned preferences for photographs amongst participants in this group was for those that depict candid moments. Farmers preferred to see images that conveyed hard work and authenticity, discussing the appeal of images that show ‘the interaction between the farm and the person [farmer] ... you interacting with your farm, not just being in it.’ Others showed a general preference for photographs of animals without people, and were drawn to images of aesthetically pleasing landscapes (e.g Fig. 4, Photo 13 – sunrise over landscape with silo). Multiple FGPs commented that they felt a sense of relaxation in the ‘old-timey’ styled B&W photographs. Fig. 5 (Photo 1 – hay rake, barn, and silo) was a lengthy subject of discussion in this group as participants cited various positive attributes including bright colors and patterns, as well as a sense of rich history in the image. This is best explained by one female farmer, who said, ‘in farming, I love the history between the farm, the silo, and the hay. Those of us that understand the story, that the machinery's replaced the animals that were



Fig. 4. Photo 13 - Sunrise over landscape with silo.



Fig. 5. Photo 1 -Hay rake, barn, and silo.

in that barn originally ... So the hay's kind of replaced the corn, too. So it tells quite a story every time.'

Some farmers noticed characteristics of physical appearance in the animals that they would not necessarily want to showcase to tourists in marketing. Other general discussion in this group centered on the need to include children the photographs, and a desire to see images that show the process of hard work and equipment in use on the farm throughout all seasons of the year (Table 3).

4.3. Focus group 3 – North Carolina livestock farmers

This group consisted of livestock farmers with an interest in agritourism but with no personal relation to the photographs. While many of the farmers did raise vegetables or other produce, they also raised livestock on their farms. Two of the farmers specialized in cattle supplemented with mixed breeds such as pigs or chickens. The remaining two farmers specialized in produce but also had smaller mixed breeds of animals on their farms such as rabbits, sheep, and chickens.

Farmers in this group made a distinction between what they might feel a personal connection to, and what they believe a tourist might like to see. One farmer said, 'I also think we risk missing ... We are not our clientele.' Another farmer mentioned a memory in which a photograph of pigs won the cover of a prominent magazine, which led to a discussion on what types of photographs of animals are the best for marketing. In general, the farmers agreed that tourists are drawn to animals with a more unique appearance (e.g. Fig. 6, Photo 15 – Red Devon cow through wire fence). There was also a consensus amongst the participants in this group that tourists would be drawn to photographs with bright colors that feature the opportunity to interact with both farmers and animals. While the farmers had a preference for more 'authentic' images, they felt that tourists might prefer to see more manicured images. One particular exchange between farmers illustrates this sentiment shared by the participants:

Farmer A: Marketing is about that line [approaching] realism...you

Table 3

Photographs with highest connection: West Virginia livestock farmers.

Photo #	Photo title	Average connection rating
12	Cow through wooden fence	3.50
15	Red Devon cow through wire fence	3.50
13	Sunrise over landscape with silo	3.42
24	Portrait of a cow (B&W)	3.33
5	Female farmer bottle-feeding oxen	3.25
1	Hay rake, barn, and silo	3.17
18	Sheep with green grass and red ear tags	3.08
21	Farmer selling ground meat	3.08
10	Flowers in front of barn (B&W)	3.00
20	Farming couple posing with ram	3.00

Note: the same connection ratings are used in each focus group.



Fig. 6. Photo 15 - Red Devon Cow Through Wire Fence.

want to be realistic, but you don't want to scare people away.

Farmer B: The feedback I get from our own websitewas people wanted to go were those pretty scenes were. I hated to break it to them but you have to really focus here to get that scene and ignore the mud [that's] real life...There are people who want to see pigs in mud and there are people who don't want to think that they're suffering in mud.

The farmers continued by discussing the role that stereotypes can play in marketing, expressing a distaste for 'the image that we all have of family farms in Iowa 1000 acres, big tractor, big barn images.' One farmer felt that small local farmers 'need to be fighting that stereotype not furthering [it].' Countering that point, another participant pointed to the example of Photo 26 (brightly colored rooster, Fig. 7), arguing that farmers should leverage those 'stereotypical' images to draw people in, and then once they are on the farm, use the opportunity to teach them just what is different about nonconventional agriculture.

In general, the participants had a desire to see photographs that evoke a sense of nostalgia or desire to connect and interact with the farmer, the animals, and the farm. A final theme within this group was the appeal of B&W photographs; the farmers liked them on a personal level, but would not use them for print or web marketing, preferring color to capture interest (Table 4).

4.4. Focus group 4 – tourist group with low agritourism experience

The participants in this group had all experienced a farm tour at some point, but reported an overall low participation rate in various types of agritourism. An interesting contrast between members of this group took shape in the opposing viewpoints held by the older and male participants who had worked or lived on farms, and the younger and female participant who was a law student, a vegan, and had limited experience with farms. This difference became evident in the discussion of Photo 1 (hay rake, barn, and silo, Fig. 5), during which a male participant described his interest in the distinctive farming equipment in the image. The younger female had a different reaction to the photo, saying 'Seeing that picture I just think of old stuff, and if I saw it, I probably wouldn't want to go.' Differences between the two demographics also emerged in discussion over the presence of fences and the

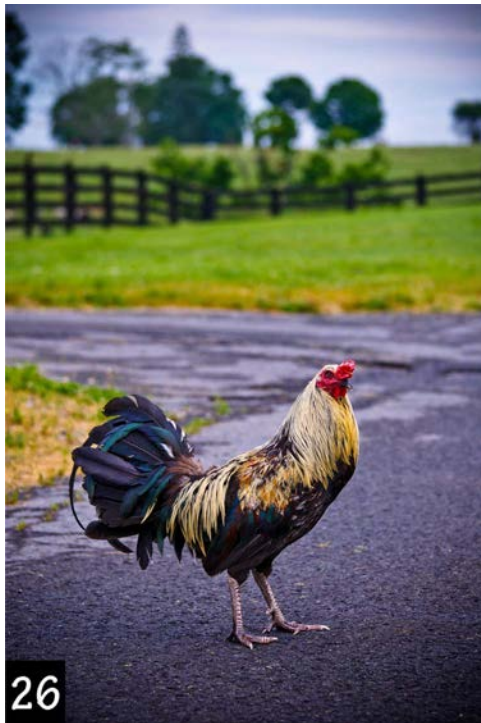


Fig. 7. Photo 26 - Brightly colored rooster.



Fig. 8. Photo 18 - Sheep with green grass and red ear tags.

this case as animals that they may not have seen before, and specifically used this word to describe the brightly colored rooster in photo 26 (this was unique to participants who were accustomed to one breed of plain white chickens) and the sheep in Fig. 8 (Photo 18 – sheep with green grass and red ear tags). Finally, participants discussed the difference in their reaction to B&W images versus those in color, feeling that B&W images ‘seem more artsy, like they’re going to be in an art book or something. Not as attractive as PR [public relations] sets (Table 5).’

4.5. Focus group 5 – tourist group with high agritourism experience

The participants in this group reported an overall high participation rate in various types of agritourism. The majority of participants in this group had visited an on farm produce stand, attended on farm events, taken hay or sleigh rides, picked their own produce, visited petting zoos, and had all been on farm tours. The dialogue in this focus group began with a discussion on group reactions to B&W photographs, with most feeling that they are a bit more ‘artsy,’ while the color photographs have greater marketability. However, one participant did comment that, ‘in a newspaper, it [B&W] would look good. I mean, I love the color pictures too, but I know color pictures in a newspaper are very expensive.’ When asked what was missing from the set of images participants reiterated the importance of including children in the images. While the feeling that children should be depicted in the photographs was present in all groups, it was most heavily emphasized within this focus group. The participants selected multiple photographs throughout the set that they felt would be improved through the inclusion of children. This was especially the case with Photo 5 (female farmer bottle feeding calves, Fig. 3), where participants felt that the image would be more effective if it were a child feeding the calves instead of an adult. One participant explains, ‘that’s because on some of the farm tours where we’ve gone, my daughter has fed the calves. It’s one of our most memorable experiences, so we really love to have [a] connection with that.’

Participants expressed an overall negative response to fences and ear tags in the images. They agreed that the fences made them feel that ‘even if you go, there’s a wall between you and the animals, [and] one of the best things about going into the farms is that you don’t really feel

Table 4
Photographs with strongest connection: North Carolina livestock farmers.

Photo #	Photo title	Average connection rating
5	Female farmer bottle-feeding oxen	3.25
8	Tourists in farmer’s truck	3.25
18	Sheep with green grass and red ear tags	3.25
19	Farmhouse kitchen scene (B&W)	3.25
26	Brightly colored rooster	3.25
14	Farming couple in scenic landscape	3
23	Fresh eggs in red basket	3
15	Red Devon cow through wire fence	3

Note: the same connection ratings are used in each focus group.

level of proximity to the animals in the images. Male participants cited a preference for close up shots of animals with no fences, feeling that ‘when it’s a photo where it’s cows or something and they’re far away, I feel like I’m not going to get the hands on [experience].’ Conversely, the young female participant placed photographs with fences amongst her favorite selections, describing an image of a cow behind a fence by saying, ‘I like it, but that’s just something I like to do (Fig. 6, Photo 15 – Red Devon cow through wire fence). If I see a cow, I would probably stand at the fence and just stare at them for 10 min.’ However, another female participant noted that seeing the animal confined behind a fence was off-putting to her (Photo 12 – cow through wooden fence), making her feel that the ‘cow is [saying] “let me out!”’

There were some elements that all of the participants were drawn to, especially those things that they would not get to see in the city, such as wide open space and scenic landscapes with lots of greenery and few structures. The participants discussed how the images of farm-houses, both interiors and exteriors, were not particularly of interest to them. Participants felt that these photographs would be useful if a tourist were interested in spending the night on the farm, but should not be included for marketing daytime tours and activities. Similar to feedback from other groups, participants noted that photographs depicting opportunities to touch and interact with unique animals were particularly effective for marketing. The participants defined unique in

Table 5
Photographs with highest connection: Low agritourism experience tourist group.

Photo #	Photo title	Average connection rating
20	Farming couple posing with ram	3.75
18	Sheep with green grass and red ear tags	3.25
26	Brightly colored rooster	3.25
8	Tourists in farmer’s truck	3
13	Sunrise over landscape with silo	3

Note: the same connection ratings are used in each focus group.



Fig. 9. Photo 8 - Tourists in farmer's truck.

Table 6
Photographs with highest connection: high agritourism experience tourist group.

Photo #	Photo title	Average connection rating
12	Cow through wooden fence	3.50
15	Red Devon cow through wire fence	3.50
13	Sunrise over landscape with silo	3.42
24	Portrait of a cow (B&W)	3.33
5	Female farmer bottle-feeding oxen	3.25
1	Hay rake, barn, and silo	3.17
18	Sheep with green grass and red ear tags	3.08
21	Farmer selling ground meat	3.08
10	Flowers in front of barn (B&W)	3.00
20	Farming couple posing with ram	3.00

Note: the same connection ratings are used in each focus group.

that wall.' In discussing the ear tags, there were two factors cited as unappealing. First, the male participant pointed out that the red ear tag (specifically in Photo 18 – sheep with green grass and red ear tags, Fig. 8) was distracting and so brightly colored that it almost became the focal point. Further, the participants agreed that not only were the tags distracting, they also reminded the viewer that the animal was bound for slaughter, and made them 'feel sorry for him. You kind of know what he's bound for. You don't want to think about that.' Finally, a great deal of emphasis was placed on the desire to see family and farmer interaction in the photographs (e.g. Fig. 9, Photo 8 – tourists in farmer's truck) because, 'farmers are our favorite thing about visiting different farms. A lot of the ones in our area I know do incredible outreach programs and have families come work with them. There's really a special thing about it, and so having them present, in any kind of marketing for the farm I think is really important.' Table 6 lists photographs with which this focus group reported strongest personal connections.

While the responses differed between farmers, community members, and tourists, there were some significant themes that emerged from the data, namely the interactions between stakeholders, desire to see children on the farm, differing outsider/insider perspectives, feelings of nostalgia, preference to see unique animals, consideration of fences, use of B&W and color images, and authenticity (Table 7).

5. Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that within ADM some photographic elements have the potential to be more successful than others in eliciting emotional responses. For example, the strong element of authenticity connects to the initial research question posed in this study, which asked, 'why are some photographs more successful than others in ADM? Specifically, what are the elements within a photograph that elicit a strong response or connection between informants and the

image?' In discussing what contributes to creating a sense of authenticity, participants indicated a preference for images in which farmers seemed more candid rather than posed. This is closely related to Phillip, Hunter, and Blackstock (2010) differentiation of specific types of agritourism such as direct vs. passive contact with tourists, working vs. nonworking farms, and staged vs. authentic experiences. The results of this study point to a tourist preference for direct, rather than passive contact, as well as authentic vs. staged experiences. For example, many of the members of the tourist groups felt that Photo 14 (farming couple in scenic landscape) was too passive in nature, contrary to their preference for Photo 5 (female farmer bottle-feeding calves), to which they ascribed descriptors such as 'passionate' and 'fulfilled'. Photo 5 contained the significant element of interaction, cited by many participants as critical for successful photographs in the marketing of agritourism. The emphasis that the tourists (from a highly populated urban city) placed on interaction relates to the suggestion of Brown and Reeder (2007) that farms located within close proximity to cities should offer recreational activities. Participants felt that the inclusion of children in the images would elicit a strong personal response. Both tourists and farmers associated photo 5 (farmer bottle feeding calves) with memories of their own children feeding animals on farms and farm tours. This reinforces the position that ensuring positive experiences (interactions) in all levels of the agritourism product will contribute to decisions to revisit the farm again (Choo & Petrick, 2014).

The results also indicated that participants, while they may have felt a personal connection to 'nostalgic' B&W images, felt that color photographs were more successful than B&W photographs for ADM. The presence of fences in the photographs was another interesting element. The majority of tourists felt that fencing in front of animals rendered

the photographs of animals less successful for marketing due to the fact that they imply barriers or distance between the tourist and the animal. This association provoked negative emotions for the participants, who felt the images with fences were 'off-putting,' or even 'sad.' While tourist and community participants discussed the element of fencing in the photographs, farmers responded to the same images by noticing animal health considerations due to the close-up nature of the images and discussing the need to manage visitor expectations.

This leads into the application of these results to the secondary research question in this study, 'is there a difference between what farmers find visually appealing and what other stakeholders are drawn to? If so, what are these differences?' The emergent difference between outsider and insider perspectives suggests that there is indeed a difference between responses for farmers and other stakeholders. Table 8 presents a summary of focus group general response attitudes towards images with the strongest emotional connections. For instance, participants in the WV farming group as well as those in the community group chose Photo 17 (male farmer opening barn door B&W) as a favorite. These 'insider' participants found this photograph appealing because they felt it realistically illustrated life and work on a farm. Conversely, tourists in both groups did not like the image, finding it unappealing because it did not communicate action well. Participant responses to Photo 18 (sheep with green grass and red ear tags) further explicated these differing reactions. Farmers and community members were drawn to this image for its bright colors and implicit opportunity for interaction with animals. This is in stark contrast to the participants in the tourists groups who concentrated on the negative connotations they associated with the ear tags in the image. Another clear contrast between what tourists found visually appealing and what farmers were drawn to was manifest in the discussion of images such as photo 3 (piglets feeding), Photo 5 (female farmer bottle-feeding calves), and Photo 15 (Red Devon cow through wire fence). The farmers' deep knowledge of animal health affected their response to these images, as some aspects of the images illustrated less than optimal health scenarios for the animals. However, tourists and community members responded in a positive manner to these same photographs for reasons such as interaction and bright colors.

Table 7
Common themes from photographs.

Theme	Notes
1. Interaction between stakeholders	Subjects preferred photos portraying animals and farmers together
2. Desire to see children on the farm	From a marketing perspective, participants preferred photographs with children
3. Differing outsider/insider perspectives	<i>Insiders</i> to farming tended to critique photographs on animal health where appropriate; <i>Outsiders</i> tended to prefer well taken photographs of animals
4. Feelings of nostalgia	- References to history - Favorite photos related to participant familiarity - Landscape photos
5. Preference towards unique animals	Preferences for visually appealing animals Common farm practices can be distracting and unpleasant, such as animal ear tags
6. Consideration of fences	Evoked negative emotions from tourists, such as animals look sad
7. Use of color and B&W images	- Color images preferred by farmers and tourists from a promotional perspective - Farmers and tourists commented on the quality of B&W photos
8. Authenticity	- Tourists preference for photos that didn't seem staged - Need to include photographs of farmers working and interacting with tourist from an agritourism perspective

Other elements that provoked a strong response between informants and the images were connected to personal memories. This finding closely relates to research question three, 'what emotions and/or associations do these images provoke for the various stakeholder audiences?' For farmers, the best example of this was their lengthy discussion on the history of the equipment in Photo 1 (hay rake, barn, and silo). Some participants in the tourist group found that images with elements of aesthetically pleasing landscapes were particularly successful in eliciting personal connections (e.g. Photo 13 – sunrise over landscape with silo). Photo 3 (piglets feeding) also called to mind personal memories for two of the tourists who recalled feeding animals in 4-H club (a youth organization). Other associations that emerged were the opportunity to buy farm products (Photo 23 – fresh eggs in red basket), associations with previous farm tour experiences (Photo 25 – male farmer driving tractor), and opportunities to view unique animals (Photo 15 – Red Devon cow through wire fence; Photo 18 – sheep with green grass and red ear tags; Photo 26 – brightly colored rooster). These findings are consistent with the assertions of [Draper et al. \(2006\)](#) that agritourists will be interested in activities that are unique to the setting of the farm, such as visiting historical sites and purchasing local food. It is also interesting to note that while tourists associated the rooster in Photo 26 with the opportunity to experience unique animals, some farmers felt that the image was too 'stereotypical'. Despite this difference in personal associations, both groups agreed that the image was well suited for marketing.

5.1. Implications

5.1.1. Practical implications

Farmers implied that they are not their own audience, differentiating between what they would personally connect with and what they would use for advertising. For instance, some of the farmer

participants discussed their personal connection to images that were in B&W. One farmer even commented, 'I see my farm in black and white,' but went on to say that he would be more inclined to use color photographs for marketing. This opinion was echoed by other farmers in the group, and further validated by the position of many tourists who felt that color images would invoke stronger tourist desires to visit a farm. The implication from these results is twofold: first, there is a difference between what farmers and -tourists might find appealing (which the farmers seemed to recognize), and second, farmers and DMOs should focus on using richly colored images for ADM.

The tourists' preference for images that depict unique animals, such as the distinct look of the brightly colored rooster (photo 26), or the vivid coloring of the Red Devon cow (Photo 15) suggests that farmers, DMOs, and other hospitality stakeholders would do well to promote unusual or uncommon breeds, offering a special experience to visitors. One female farmer suggested taking advantage of this preference by using such photographs as an entrée to education. 'People who are looking for agritourism are so disconnected from food in general. They're almost attracted to some things like [Photo 26] just because they think, 'Oh, we want to go to a farm with a pretty rooster. We're going to start there, and then they learn about the alternative or sustainable things that are going on in the background.'

Results also imply the necessity to use photographs to form realistic expectations for the visitor. For example, farmers who discussed Photo 6 (long-horned cow in mud) felt that the mud might turn off a tourist and while it may not be appealing to a visitor, it would be unwise to lead them to believe that visiting the farm is a clean and pristine experience. The farmers suggested cropping the image so that it still showed the cow in mud, but made the cow the focal point and deemphasized the amount of mud in the photo.

Another ramification of these results is that ADM should emphasize authenticity, publicizing photographs of farmers taking part in physical

Table 8
Summary of key differences among participant groups regarding photography elements that elicited an emotional connection.

Photographic Element	Community Group	West Virginia Livestock Farmers	North Carolina Livestock Farmers	Tourist Group with Low Agritourism Experience	Tourist Group with High Agritourism Experience
Animals behind fencing	-	-/+	-/+	-	-
Farmers working	+	+	+	+	+
Landscapes	+	+	- /+	+	+
Feeding animals	+	+	+/-	+	+
Farm equipment	+	+	+	-	+/-
Animal close-ups	+	+/-	+	+	+
Image of sheep with ear tags	+	+	+	+/-	+/-
Farm products	+	n/a	+/-	+	+

*Negative response (-), Positive response (+), Positive and negative responses (+/-).
No comment (n/a).

labor or operation of farm equipment while interacting with tourists. This implies that photographs for marketing should contain images of farmers interacting with tourists (with a clear distinction between the farmer and the tourist). Furthermore, it should be a priority to advertise the potential for children to interact with farmers and animals.

Many non-farmer participants felt that fencing in front of animals in the photographs conveyed limited possibilities for interaction. There were a few participants who reacted positively to Photos 12 (cow through wooden fence) and 15 (cow through wire fence), associating the fences with past memories of being in proximity to farm animals. However, the general consensus was that fences in front of animals call to mind negative connotations about confinement. Tourists felt that the photographs should call attention to the specialness of the small farm, differentiating between the appealing image of free-range grass fed animals and the negativity associated with images from confined animal feeding operations. Similarly, tourists expressed an aversion to photographs that showed animals with ear tags. While some participants did state that they understood the practicality of the tags, their responses indicated that farmers should make efforts to de-emphasize the tags in photographs. This could be achieved by positioning the animal in such a way that the tag is not as noticeable, or using muted colored ear tags.

Tourists also clearly indicated their desire to see more options for buying produce. While it was explained to FGPs that this study focused explicitly on livestock farmers, tourist participants made it clear that many of them would not participate in the tour if there were only opportunities to see livestock farms (and no produce farms). Tourists pointed out that they often want to buy produce, and learn about how those food products are grown. This indicates an opportunity for agritourism operators and destination marketers to include a variety of farms in regional agritourism experiences offering a diverse range of meat, vegetable, fiber, and dairy products. These types of partnerships may be especially advantageous in the pursuit of the 'horizontal alliances for collaborative marketing' suggested by Che et al. (2005).

Finally, the results provide several connections to the existing literature on agritourism and marketing. For example, considering that Rilla et al. (2011) found that business cards/brochures, and websites were among the most effective modes of marketing for agritourism, while Jensen, Bruch, Menard, and English (2013), reported that farms who participated in regional branding experienced increased sales through collaborative marketing. This might imply that elements of the most successful images in this study should be considered for marketing multiple farms to create a regional brand.

5.1.2. Academic implications

Several findings from this study extend or support previous research on agritourism destinations. For example, Srikatanyoo and Campiranon (2010) noted differences between male and female agritourists, finding that female agritourists have the potential to be more demanding customers, and will place a high value on safety, while male customers, who still value safety, have a greater motivation to seek out appealing scenery. This study further extends that finding as male participants often chose photographs of landscapes (especially in the tourist groups) as their favorites. Choo and Petrick (2014) found that visitors to farms were more likely to be repeat visitors when they experienced positive social interactions. This finding was supported by the results of this study, in which tourists, farmers, and community members reported strong feelings that photographs of agritourism should emphasize interaction, as it is an imperative piece of the agritourism experience. The multitude of participants who expressed a desire to see photographs that depict action on the farm also supports Schnell (2011) argument, that agritourism has contributed to the recognition of farms as destinations on their own, leading to the positioning of farms as active landscapes in tourism marketing.

Additionally, this study begins to address the lack of understanding regarding the motivations of customers is a major barrier to agritourism

development (Srikatanyoo & Campiranon, 2010); by tapping into the various motivations of customers, especially illustrated in the themes centered on nostalgia. Multiple participants noted how their personal history with farms shaped their responses to the photographs, implying that previous positive relationships with farming are one important motivation for agritourists. These motivations are related to the emotional connections that participants made to memories of their personal childhood experiences with farms, as well as the emotional connection to memories of their own children experiencing farms. However, more research is needed in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of agritourist needs and motivations. Gao, Barbieri, and Valdivia (2013) called for future research to examine how human relationships with land influence landscape preferences. This study found a connection between participant's memories, as well as previous experiences, of farms and their photo preferences. For instance, most participants who had extensive relationships with agricultural landscapes preferred to see images in close proximity to animals. Other participants, who had a more removed relationship to agricultural landscapes, placed images with fencing between the viewer and the animal amongst their favorite selections. This sheds light on the need for research to further explore how previous experience with farms affects visitor's preferences within agricultural landscapes.

There are also implications for further exploration of the connection between agritourism and culinary tourism. As Quan and Wang (2003) pointed out, the marketing of food can reinforce the long-term sustainability of a destination while also contributing to the regional branding of food products. Farmer participants in this study commented on the difficulties they face in producing styled food product photographs, which was complemented by an expressed desire from tourists to see more images that showcase the opportunity to buy local food products. Further research may focus on theories related to the outsider/insider theme that was prevalent in this study. A deeper understanding of how personal memories and motivations affect perceptions of photographs used for ADM may contribute to more sound design choices in subject matter that will meet the needs of potential tourists, farmers, and destination managers.

5.1.3. Limitations and future research directions

This study was limited to a small sample size of tourists, all of which were residents in one geographic location. Participant reactions to the photographs could differ based on geographical setting and landscapes, with some tourists preferring to see farms in familiar settings. The tourists' experiences with farms varied greatly, and there were more female participants in this study, creating an inherent bias towards the female perspective.

During farmer focus groups, it was also suggested that the set of images should have included photographs taken during all four seasons, allowing tourists to envision a variety of settings. While the data does contribute to a general understanding of major themes within this type of marketing, there remain multiple opportunities for future research. If the study were to be replicated or adapted, it might be bolstered through the inclusion of the opinions of more tourists, including participants who may have never visited a farm in a work or a recreational capacity. Future research could also blend qualitative and quantitative data, utilizing an online survey tool that would allow researchers to quantify participant responses. Future studies may include a variety of age groups, exploring how photographs might be used to reach younger target markets such as college students or young professionals.

Furthermore, a study that includes multi-media pieces that pair sounds and audio with images of agritourism could be extremely useful to marketers. Researchers may also consider conducting studies that compare how various topographies within farm settings could affect results, presenting participants with photographs of farms in multiple states comparing mountain versus coastal or arid versus humid landscapes.

6. Conclusion

Agritourism is emerging as an effective tool for the preservation of small family farms, providing farmers with the opportunity to educate consumers while diversifying farm incomes. Visitors to agritourism destinations infuse local economies through additional contributions to local economic sustainability (Che et al., 2005; Weaver, 2006). Effective marketing materials are one of the fundamental tools needed in order to ensure continued growth of agritourism destinations. These marketing materials should be designed with concern to the varying needs of all stakeholders in ADM, tailoring to the diverse emotional responses and associations that photographs may elicit for members of each segment. It is clear that a greater understanding of tourist motivations is needed to inform both future research and effective marketing of rural agricultural destinations. The illustrated potential of photographs to elicit emotional responses and personal associations

with previous farm experiences warrants further exploration of how to leverage these connections within ADM. These exploratory findings shed some light on the differences between how farmers, tourists, and destination stakeholders respond to the images used in marketing agritourism, highlighting key themes that may be instrumental in the future design of destination marketing materials.

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Appendix A. Description of photographs

Photo #	Photo title	Category
1	Hay rake, barn, and silo	Landscape
2	Farmer and tourist in field	People
3	Piglets feeding	Animals
4	Farmhouse with barn in background	Interiors/built environment
5	Female farmer bottle-feeding oxen	People
6	Long horned cow in mud	Animals
7	Farmhouse guest room	Interiors/built environment
8	Tourists in farmer's truck	People
9	Cows in open green field	Animals
10	Flowers in front of barn (B&W)	Landscapes
11	Tourist in hay wagon taking pictures	People
12	Cow through wooden fence	Animals
13	Sunrise over landscape with silo	Landscapes
14	Farming couple in scenic landscape	People
15	Red Devon cow through wire fence	Animals
16	Historic graveyard on farm grounds	Landscapes
17	Male farmer opening barn door (B&W)	People
18	Sheep with green grass and red ear tags	Animals
19	Farmhouse kitchen scene (B&W)	Interiors/built environment
20	Farming couple posing with ram	People
21	Farmer selling ground meat	People
22	Portrait of a horse (B&W)	Animals
23	Fresh eggs in red basket	Interiors/built environment
24	Portrait of a cow (B&W)	Animals
25	Male farmer driving tractor	People
26	Brightly colored rooster	Animals

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